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ABSTRACT

Suggestions for improving communication and public relations are offered in this guidebook for school office personnel. Because of the high visibility and accessibility of their positions, such staff serve important public relations functions for the school. Chapter 1 examines the public relations role of school office personnel, and chapter 2 provides specific strategies for improving public and community relations. Guidelines for improving office practices and school relations are described in chapter 3, and the fourth chapter offers self-help tips and reminders. (LMI)

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A guide to effective public relations for educational office personnel

Portraying a Positive Image

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A guide to effective
public relations
for educational
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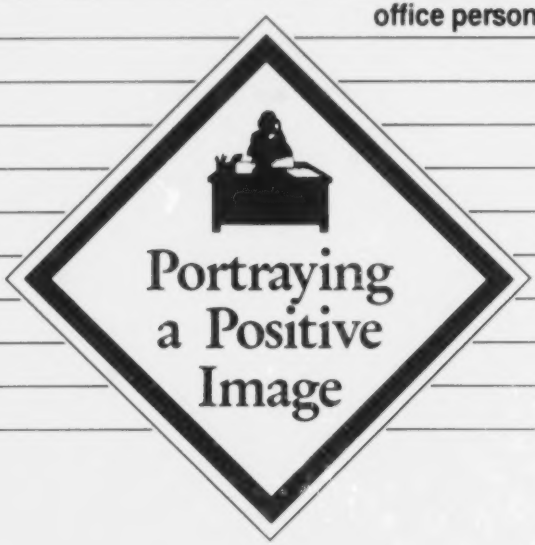

Portraying a Positive Image

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Preface

Typically, when a youngster or citizen or parent enter a public school, the first person they meet will be a secretary or other office personnel. At that moment, the school's image is on the line. Perhaps no other member of the school family of employees has such challenging responsibilities as the school secretary.

Secretaries are called upon to do many things: help a sick child, soothe an angry parent, pamper an overworked boss, mediate staff squabbles and run an efficient office —all of this and more — with the poise of an ambassador and the patience of a saint.

Such attention to the needs of students becomes a key link in ensuring that the schools serve all the citizens of the community. As all members of the school staff seek to teach and to care for the children under their charge, the role of the secretary becomes increasingly demanding, requiring proper personal skills and continuous professional development.

Portraying a Positive Image is a concise guidebook for school office personnel that contains many tips and suggestions for effective communications and public relations. It is not intended to be the definitive book about office personnel and business practices. It is intended to be a helpful guide for school administrators and school officials in their development of professional, caring school secretaries and office personnel. Maintaining public confidence in our schools begins at the schoolhouse door and most often at the desk of the school secretary.

The Pennsylvania School Boards Association is pleased to offer another resource for local officials as we jointly seek excellence in our public schools.

Joseph V. Oravitz
PSBA Executive Director

Acknowledgments

Portraying a Positive Image is a collection of helpful tips and suggestions for school administrators and educational office personnel.

The material in this book will help secretaries and others who work in the education setting learn how to create a positive climate by their personal "public relations" — with staff members, parents, students and the public.

Special recognition is expressed to **James A. Gilmartin,** superintendent of Hamburg Area School District, Berks County, for sharing the district's handbook "The Effective Educational Secretary," compiled by **Miriam M. Kline,** director of district support services. Also, gratitude goes to **Shirley M. Longnaker,** secretary to the principal of E.H. Phillips Elementary School in the Central Dauphin School District, Dauphin County, and president of the PSBA Department of Educational Secretaries/Office Personnel, who contributed several items for inclusion in this collection.

Typesetting, layout and design were completed by **Crystal Jacobs,** PSBA typesetter/graphic designer. **Lynn H. Mannion,** PSBA publication services director, served as project coordinator.

Other resources are identified at the end of each article, including **Judy K. McDaniel,** Washington State School Directors Association communications director, who conducts workshops for educational office personnel.

The association is grateful to all who assisted in the production of this guidebook for Pennsylvania's educational secretaries.

Nick Goble
PSBA Assistant Executive Director

"IF" for educational secretaries

If you can communicate cheerfully with all the public
teachers, board members, parents, children and all the rest
You represent the quality of the school district
and the identification with the very best!

If you can keep your cool when tempers heat and flare
and deal with the unexpected with a little grin,
You'll keep your school in an even balance
and be the catalyst that helps us all to win.

If you can be a friend and confidante to all the children
and seek to gently guide, not to control,
And neither be too lax nor too demanding
But keep in mind the worth of every soul.

If you can strive, not caring who gets credit,
and work at helping all within school walls,
The adults and children with equal merit,
and never fail to help someone who falls.

If you can give your help without begrudging
the patience, time and effort you impart.
If you can be dedicated to education and be caring
and see, not with your eyes, but with your heart.

If you can carry the burden of knowing many a private thing
and a personal integrity that is beyond reproach,
And be a friendly face in the front office
You'll be a special friend to those who need you most.

If you are a Pennsylvania Educational Secretary
you help your community beyond compare,
When you give freely to those about you
the skills and talents that are yours to share.

If you can be all things to all people
and work in partnership with those about you.
Then, you're a very special person in our schools
For whom gratitude, respect and honor are due!

— ***Ann J. Denoncourt,*** *Past President*
Pennsylvania School Boards Association

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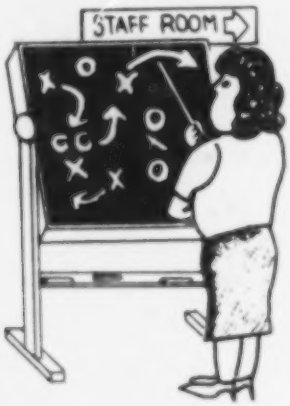
Chapter 1

The Public Relations Role of School Office Personnel



Join the team

Most educational secretaries work as part of a network of people who make up the school team. If the school's service is good, there are others to share the credit. If it's poor, there are people to share the blame. But, if you believe the old saying that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, you know that your school's performance is only as good as yours.

You all make a choice about the role you'll play on the school team. Either you join it as an actively caring member, or you go through the motions from the sidelines. When you choose to join the team, you will have a better chance to garner satisfaction from your work. The choice is yours.

Here are some key attitudes that take you off the sidelines.

• **I make a difference here.** What I do makes it possible for my office to run smoothly. My efforts show up in the quality of my office's services. I'm part of what the public sees when it judges the school district. With every letter, every phone conversation, every personal contact, I make a statement about the caliber of service the school offers. How I feel on a given day affects the people I work with. I help to set the tone in the office. I know that when I bring real enthusiasm to the job, I make a contribution few others can equal.

• **I take responsibility for what bothers me.** When a situation is causing me trouble at work, I approach it as my problem.

Whether it's a procedure that isn't working, a practice I feel is unfair, or a person I'm having difficulty working with, I do what I can to change the situation. Sometimes it takes patience. More often than not, it takes knowing when to speak up and when to wait, and how to coolly and rationally use my powers of persuasion. When I can't get a situation changed, I look for ways to minimize its effect on me. Most important, I remember that I've chosen to work here, and as long as I'm here, I'll give my best.

• **I take an interest in my school district.** I know that an organization is greater than the sum of its parts; it has a life and personality of its own. I'm interested in how this school district got to be what it is today, and how the people in it have grown as it has. My knowledge of the workings of the school not only helps me in my work, but also makes the work more interesting. It's part of what makes me a valuable employee, and it helps me set my own career goals and plan my future. I try to think beyond my particular job to the kind of service I'd like to receive. Because I'm interested in what makes us successful, I notice what's happening in business, politics or technology that's going to affect us.

You should be proud to be a strong, reliable member of your school's team. Your success, as well as your school's, depends on it.

— Reprinted from ***The Effective Educational Secretary,*** *by* ***Miriam M. Kline,*** *director of district support services, Hamburg Area School District, Berks Co., January 1989.*

You as a public relations representative

Secretaries and other office personnel are among the school's most important public relations representatives. You are equally important to internal staff relationships as to the external public relationships. In survey after survey, of both the public (those who do not work in the school system) and school staff members themselves, the school secretary is listed as the **key person in communications.**

Office personnel are usually the first people contacted by a parent with a complaint, a police officer following up on a citizen concern, the teacher who wishes to see the principal, or the newspaper reporter. Frequently you are seen as the interpreter of policy, the go-between to the "boss," the dispenser of students' medicine, and the press contact.

You are the key public relations people for the school or the school system office with which the public, both internal and external, deals. In no other field are competent secretaries as necessary as in that of education. School secretaries not only should possess all the attributes and skills that make for efficiency in work, but also must have those qualities that enable them to adjust to myriad situations and people. The ability to move into an unfamiliar routine, answer scores of questions, search for knowledge, and display initiative are absolute prerequisites in the position.

Perhaps more than any other members of the support staff,

PR – a planned, systematic, two-way process of communication.

office personnel play a major role in setting the climate of the school or district office. It can be warm, organized, with confidential information respected and a positive attitude expressed, or it can be the opposite.

Secretaries who know their position is highly valued, whose efforts are recognized by the building principal and administrators, and who are kept informed by the "boss" with critical school district information will be well on the way toward being key public relations representatives for the schools.

— ***School Communication Workshop Kit,*** *National School Public Relations Association.*

How to communicate with your publics: Parents, teachers and students

Your communications role requires you to decide on who are your publics, forces you to listen to what each public wants and needs in the way of information, and necessitates that you determine how you can get certain information to a given group. Here are some tips on working with parents, teachers and students.

Parents

- Treat parents, either on the phone or when they visit, as respected colleagues in the business of educating children. Take time to explain things.
- Keep searching for better ways to get information out to parents. Sending notices home with students isn't always the best way, especially after the fifth grade.
- Invite parents to comment on the messages they get from school, including the school newsletter if there is one.
- Develop a "Welcome Wagon" approach to greet new parents, perhaps enlisting the help of other parents.
- Make sure all parents have the school calendar.

- Use information "stuffers" about school programs in report cards and other routine mailings.
- Let parents know about any recreation or adult education programs available through the schools.

Being a professional

You are part of a profession, a most demanding and rewarding one. Being an educational office employee demands the best of what you are or can be and the rewards are inestimable.

A true professional exhibits the following qualities:

• **Self-discipline** — Allow yourself time to be well-groomed, properly fed and composed when you arrive at school each morning. (You know it will be bedlam soon enough.) Plan your day, your week, your month and your school year and have the ability to follow those plans with changes, revisions, deletions and additions.

• **Dependability** — Be there when you are needed with the required materials and in the right frame of mind when the principal, teacher, parent or student needs you.

• **Reliability** — Your principal assigns a job and expects it to be completed. Can you be relied on to complete that job and go beyond the exact assignment to follow through with appropriate action?

• **Technical skills** — Top-notch ability is a prerequisite of a professional educational office employee.

• **Loyalty** — Sometimes viewed as old-fashioned, loyalty is an integral part of being a professional. Your principal is your boss and is a part of the school district. A certain loyalty to your district and to your principal is necessary and is expected. Not a blind loyalty, but an understanding of the principal's and the district's positions and problems will soften the constructive criticism from time to time.

— Reprinted from ***The Effective Educational Secretary,*** *Hamburg Area School District, Berks Co.; originally appeared in the* ***Handbook for Elementary School Offices,*** *San Diego City School District.*

- Don't get trapped into telling one individual one thing and another individual something else. Parents do compare notes. It's an ancient axiom, but honesty really is the best policy. And besides that, then you don't have to remember what you said.

Teachers

Sometimes, teachers feel bogged down with the paperwork that "the office" requires. They also may feel that their needs aren't taken care of properly or promptly.

On the other hand, office work is sometimes more difficult when teachers don't meet deadlines. Educational office personnel may feel that a teacher's request gets prompt and courteous attention. And, keep your ear to the ground to pick up things that seem to be annoying teachers.

- Ask to be included on as many teacher planning sessions as possible so that clerical functions that support the instructional program can be developed at the same time.
- Organize the office staff so that teachers can get quick service on their requests for instructional materials.
- Make it easy for teachers to get the supplies they need.
- Set up a system to make it easy for teachers to send notes to parents.
- Make sure there's mutual understanding between teachers and office personnel on how messages for teachers will be handled.

Students

It's important to remember that parents get most of their information about schools from the children themselves. And, the reports that the children carry home depend on the kind of treatment they get in school, not just from their teachers, but from you too.

As a member of the school family, educational office personnel have many opportunities to show children and young people that you care, and there are times when you are a special friend in need.

- Be yourself. Students can spot a phony every time.
- Explain school policies in words the students can understand.

- Organize quick ways to get messages to students.
- Make sure students always can get in touch with their parents when necessary.
- Don't agree to act as a go-between in a student-teacher conflict, but do help bring them together to discuss a problem.
- Pay special attention to new students. Make sure they're assigned another student to help them "learn the ropes."
- Don't make promises to students you can't keep.
- Try your best to remain unprejudiced toward students, even the ones who are labeled "known troublemakers."
- Make sure you know about community agencies that will give confidential help to students with serious problems (drugs, pregnancy, depression).
- Remember you're a constant example to young people and, as such, shun rumor and gossip.
- Above all, recognize what and how much authority you have and stay within bounds. With any authority comes responsibility and the necessity for confidentiality.

— Excerpted from a presentation by ***Judith K. McDaniel,*** *communications director, Washington State School Directors Association.*

What is an educational secretary?

As an educational secretary you need three hats for your three jobs.

The first job is for the principal and the assistant principal, reminding them of their appointments, deadlines, duties and responsibilities. Who do they ask for advice and support? Who warns them that the parent on "hold" is irate? You guessed it. You do.

The second hat you wear is for doing "everything else." Everything else means typing, duplicating, answering the phone, arranging appointments, correcting spelling, rewriting letters, signing checks, counting money, operating the computer, passing out memos, working the switchboard, reminding teachers that they have missed deadlines, collecting papers, and smiling when you don't really feel like it.

Your third hat is the psychiatry cap. While a couch always isn't available, you maintain a steady practice. Teachers who are upset with students, students who are upset with teachers, administrators who have problems with students, and parents who call to gripe about the school all rely on you as a sounding board.

Your title can most accurately be spelled with only three letters. You help wear the hat of the principal and the assistant principal, so give yourself a **P.** You do "everything" in the office, so take an **E.** People treat you like a psychiatrist, so give yourself another **P.** The three letters spell **PEP,** and you need it to do the job.

In spite of all this, as an educational secretary I was richly compensated in experiences.

— Reprinted from the January 1986 ***PAES Newsletter;*** *contributed by* ***Anita Benedict,*** *retired secretary in the Lampeter-Strasburg School District, Lancaster Co.*

Chapter 2

Public and Community Relations

You as a representative of the school

No one in the school system has a more important day-to-day public relations assignment than educational office personnel. Some are so skilled in PR ways that teachers and administrators could benefit by seeking a little advice; others are doing irreparable damage, creating ill will faster than others can build good will.

You are always on the PR firing line. Yours is the telephone voice of the school, the person who is directly confronted with complaints, crackpots, and seekers after all kinds of information. Here are some tips for educational office personnel.

1. Assume there is no such person as an enemy of the public schools. Your premise must be that everyone's views, no matter how haywire they sound to you, are aimed at school improvement. This attitude will help take the wind out of the critics' sails.

2. Know your schools. Know everything anyone might normally expect of you — and more. Know all about such data as class size, building problems, school finance facts.

3. Treat all school patrons alike, no matter how obnoxious some of them seem to be. Be willing to listen. Most grievances can be dissolved through friendliness and understanding. Your attitude will do much to stimulate a favorable atmosphere.

4. Never give the impression of superiority. Don't "put 'em in their place."

5. Remember that the child comes first.

6. Avoid generalizing, whether at school or away from it.

7. Be loyal to co-workers. A negative comment about one reflects upon all.

8. Don't breach a confidence whether it's about a child, parent or teacher.

9. But, on the other hand, **avoid giving the impression the school has secrets.** While there may be confidential information about an individual, it should be made clear that the public information policy is frank, honest and forthright.

10. Remind yourself constantly that your telephone voice should be friendly, cheerful, interested and helpful. Avoid sounding busy. Be a good listener. Avoid arguments. Make it clear that every effort will be made to provide the requested information as quickly as possible.

11. Be cordial to visitors. It's more than a smile. Show you're concerned with whatever the visitor is inquiring about. Let the "hothead" get his grievance off his chest. Make visitors feel the schools not only welcome their calls but also appreciate their interest.

12. Don't procrastinate or stall. Make every effort to handle complaints and information requests promptly and politely. If delay is unavoidable, make appropriate explanations or apologies. Make every effort to see that appointments are kept.

13. Don't presume to answer for the administration or school board unless specifically authorized to do so. Then say, "Mr. Doe has asked us to explain . . ."

14. Don't give the impression that you are trying to "cover" for the administrator.

— Excerpted from ***PR Pointers for Secretaries,*** *Public Relations Gold Mine, Vol. III, National School Public Relations Association, 1966.*

Setting the office 'climate'

Enter first-time visitors to your school office. Will you, they wonder, be a sweetheart or a sourpuss? They don't know, they've never been here before. The first person they see is — YOU.

It's a fact of school life. You help shape the school image. When your "public" thinks of school, it certainly looks like you. If you're pleasant and helpful to those first-time visitors, they will figure that this is the kind of school that just naturally sprouts winners. If you're not, they may go quietly, but likely they will be thinking unprintable thoughts — not only about you, but also about the school.

The same is true when citizens telephone the school. They wonder whether the voice at the other end will be bored or bubbly. Will the voice put them off, put them down, or put them on interminable hold? Whatever happens, they form an impression of the school that sticks in their minds like Elmer's glue.

In other words — you must do a good job communicating.

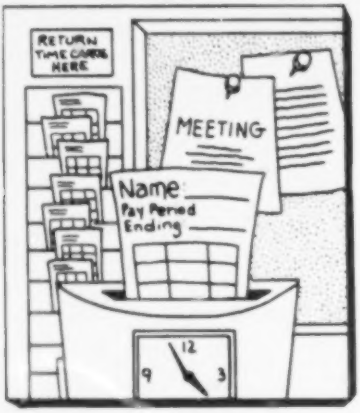
Consider this: A number of recent opinion polls have been shown that when people say they "know someone" at the nearest school building, the "someone" is usually the school secretary. Furthermore respondents to these polls say they tend to believe what they hear from an office staff member and other support staff in the school rather than from school district administrators or even from the board of education.

What do they want or need to know?
How do they or can they get this information?
Am I the source?

There's also some good evidence that the "climate" set in the school by the office staff spreads to the teaching and administrative staff. The feelings people have about how friendly the place is or how good a place it is to learn, research shows, depend largely on the way office staff deal with one another and with students, teachers and administrators.

The picture that emerges from this research indicates that the office staff is the most common contact point between the public and the schools. It also shows that office personnel have a strong influence on teachers and administrators who, in turn, strongly influence attitudes students take home. And since most people seem to base their attitudes about schools on what they personally KNOW about schools, the chances are high that their attitudes will be directly or indirectly influenced by school office personnel like you.

— Reprinted from ***The Effective Educational Secretary,*** *Hamburg Area School District, Berks Co.; originally printed in* ***Making the Wheels Go Round,*** *National School Public Relations Association, 1985.*



Being part of the team

Are you and your boss a team? Do you set priorities and discuss coming events so you each know what to expect of the other? According to an article in the Oct. 17, 1985, issue of *The Creative School Secretary*, teamwork is the "most valuable asset and the key to true professionalism . . ." Both the supervisor and the secretary have guidelines which, if followed, will command the respect of anyone dealing with the school office. Here are four guidelines to help the secretary work more efficiently as a part of the team.

1. Display organizational ability — This includes prioritizing your work according to the developments of the day. A daily conference with the supervisor can help set these priorities.

2. Follow through or "keep on the trail" — Keep a calendar of events as you become aware of them. A reminder note can be placed on the calendar a day or two before the actual event is to take place so there will be no "surprises" for you or your boss.

3. Get the facts the time-saving way — There are times when a report or letter may need additional facts that you can obtain through other sources rather than by interrupting your boss.

4. Be a detective — Events and dates or other items can be gleaned from incoming correspondence or minutes from meetings. These can be placed on your calendar of events and can be used to prepare a reminder for your boss. At times, research can be done ahead of time so the materials or reports will be on hand when needed.

10 commandments for human relations

1. **Speak to people** — There is nothing as nice as a cheerful word of greetings.
2. **Smile at people** — It takes 72 muscles to frown and only 14 to smile.
3. **Call people by name** — The sweetest music to many ears is the sound of one's own name.
4. **Be friendly and helpful** — If you would have friends, be friendly.
5. **Be cordial** — Speak and act as though everything you do is a genuine pleasure.
6. **Have a genuine interest in people.**
7. **Be generous with praise** — And cautious with criticism.
8. **Be considerate of the feelings of others** — There are three sides to controversy: yours, the other side and the right one.
9. **Be thoughtful of the opinions of others.**
10. **Be alert to give service** — What counts most in life is what you do for others.

In addition to what the secretary can do, here are five ways the boss can help you be an efficient member of the team.

1. Let you know the schedule — When leaving the office or coming in late, it always is helpful if the boss keeps you informed.

2. Loyalty is a two-way street — Both secretary and administrator need to keep one another's confidences, in and out of the school situation. Much confidential information is entrusted to the office team and both must live up to the trust shown.

3. Don't demand the impossible — Most school offices are beehives of activity. Demands are made upon the office staff from many sources: pupils, students, teachers and parents, to name a few. Bosses should give you ample warning of an impending "crash" job. A daily conference before the busy day begins will help set priorities.

4. Courtesy goes a long way — Suggestions about the quality of work or criticism should be done privately to avoid embarrassment to both team members. Social amenities, such as a friendly "good morning" or an occasional compliment or "You did a good job on that" go a long way in creating goodwill.

5. Specific routines — Duties, policies and procedures should be clearly outlined so that you can be efficient in carrying out the responsibilities in the office.

When the administrator and the secretary have a good working relationship, are considerate of one another, plan and prioritize their work, and keep one another informed, the end result will be a professional, well-run office.

— Reprinted from the May 1988 ***PAES/OP Newsletter;*** *contributed by* ***Shirley M. Longnaker CEOE,*** *secretary to the principal of E.H. Phillips Elementary School, Central Dauphin School District, Dauphin Co.*

Being the best

Who can deny the importance of determination on those "impossible" days when just **getting** to the office is a major challenge. Perhaps you've tenderly nursed a sick child through the night, lost hours of sleep pondering over a personal problem or attending night classes. Being cheerful, attentive and amiable requires every ounce of willpower you possess when you're heavy-lidded, weary and desperate for a secluded corner to rest in.

It takes no small effort, either, to ignore a throbbing headache, overcome a gloomy mood, or sprinkle sympathy on troubled callers when you're deeply enmeshed in problems of your own. But is there any other way to be "best" at your job?

Good telephone manners

When speaking on the phone, it's wise to remember the old adage that you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Good telephone etiquette in the workplace is rare, often qualifying for the endangered-species list of proper social behavior.

Each time a school district's phone is answered, the educational secretary is "the school" to the caller. It is important to convey a professional manner, especially when this may be the citizen's only contact with the school.

Good telephone skills come down to a few basics: Answer promptly, communicate clearly, avoid putting callers on indefinite "holds," and make sure messages are accurate and are received by the intended person.

Phones should be answered within two or three rings. The school's name should be spoken distinctly — not slurred, mumbled or rushed out so quickly that it cannot be understood. If the person the caller is seeking is not available, the following example response should be offered: "I'm sorry, Mr. Smith is out of the office now, but he is expected in an hour. May I take a message?"

When placing a call on hold, the proper response is "Please hold" or "Just a minute, please," not the rude command, "Hold on." Calls should not be put on indefinite hold. The phone answerer should return to the line periodically to see if the caller wants to continue holding. If information is being sought for the

A nice 'touch'

With just a little effort it's often possible to identify the frequent caller by his voice. When you do recognize a voice and say, "How nice to hear from you again, Mr. Palmer" — how can he help being pleased? Wouldn't you? And when you say goodbye, why not add a refreshing thought, "Thank you so much for calling us, Mr. Smart!"

caller, again the phone answerer should re-check the line from time to time to report how much longer the search is expected to take.

Calls should not be transferred unless absolutely necessary. Be sure to give the number to which the caller is being referred as well as a person's or the department's name. Do not leave callers in the dark.

Another important item to remember is that background distractions should be kept to a minimum. This means turning off radios, televisions and public-address systems. The sound of computer printers, electronic typewriters or other equipment should be muffled, if possible. In addition, don't have conversations with colleagues while a caller is on the line.

Phone messages are helpful only if they reach the intended person. There should be a central location for holding message memos, especially if more than one person answers the phone. It also is helpful if messages are written on some type of standardized memo; don't use the backs of envelopes or scrap paper — they are too easily overlooked.

All messages should have a minimum of information — the date and time the call was received, the caller's name and phone number, and the name of the person taking the message. A brief note about the subject of the call also is helpful.

Good telephone manners are neither complicated nor mysterious — nor do they need to be stuffy. They can be learned quickly and easily.

Here's a checklist to help you decide whether you're using the telephone as a tool to build good public relations for your school

Keys to telephone excellence

To make sure that telephones in your office are answered in the most effective way possible, consider the following points.

1. When a new phone system is installed in the office, practice using all its features with co-workers before or after office hours. That way you won't have to tell a caller, "I'm going to try to transfer your call."

2. Remember names. Jot down the caller's name on a piece of paper the first time you hear it, and refer to it during the call. Using the caller's name will help you remember it.

3. Observe ordinary courtesies like saying "please" when you ask someone to do something and "thank you" when they do it. Conclude conversations with a pleasant comment like, "It's been good talking with you, Mrs. Smith." Every call handled correctly adds to the store of goodwill the public feels for the school.

4. Assure people of your personal willingness and ability to provide excellent service. If you find that a caller must be called back, say, "Please let me have your name and number and I will see that Mr. Martin gets your message."

5. Smile before you answer the phone. When you smile your voice sounds more pleasant.

6. Avoid "emotional leakage." Most of the rudeness that telephone callers encounter is unintentional. It often happens because the person answering the phone allows the frustration caused by another situation to affect the way the call is handled. Remember, the caller isn't responsible for the way you feel, and it isn't fair to take everything out on him.

7. Meet anger with helpfulness. If the caller is angry, remind yourself that there is nothing personal in the anger that seems to be directed at you. Hang on to your good humor.

8. Project professionalism. When you answer the phone, your tone of voice should convey the message: "I am confident, I am competent, you can trust me."

— Excerpted from ***The Office Professional****, a newsletter of Professional Training Associates, Inc., Round Rock, TX, Oct. 15, 1988.*

or school system. If you can answer "yes" to most of these items, you rate a medal.

- I know the telephone system up, down, and sideways.
- I have attempted to get to know people and departments so that I will know who can answer questions which do not involve my school or department.
- I know how to handle calls from the media.
- Should an emergency such as an accident, bomb scare or student riot take place in the school, I'm familiar with procedures for handling calls from parents or media.
- I have an established procedure for transferring calls.
- I try to answer the telephone on the first ring.
- I have established a "communications center" at my desk with directories, maps, schedules, calendars, notepads and pencils within easy reach.
- I listen carefully to what callers are telling me, attempting to get the gist of the message as quickly as possible.
- If I can't help the caller, I try to put him or her in touch with someone who can.
- When I must be away from my phone, I make arrangements for someone to take my calls.
- I treat calls from co-workers with the same courtesy and efficiency accorded outside calls.
- I often use the words: "Thank you," "You're welcome," "I'll be glad to help you," and "Call again."
- When I place a caller on hold, I check every minute or so to report progress or to ask if the caller would like to continue to hold. If I must leave the phone to gather information for a caller, I ask if the caller would "mind holding for a moment while I get what we need." Then I thank the caller for waiting.

90% of all friction of daily life is caused by the wrong tone of voice.

Tips on recalling names and faces

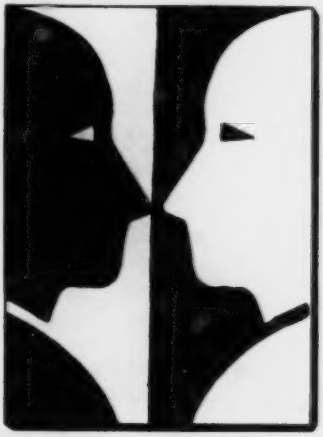
Recalling names and faces might seem a simple matter, but it isn't. Trouble is, most names have no logical "connection" to faces. Tony Buzan, author of *Use Your Perfect Memory*, offers the following steps for remembering the people you meet.

- **Develop a mental test.** Tell yourself your memory is going to improve. Conversely, if you keep reminding yourself that you have a bad memory for names and faces, your memory will prove that you're absolutely right. So prepare yourself to meet people: When you're poised and relaxed, your memory works better than if you're harried and nervous.
- **Observe.** Look people straight in the eye; concentrate on facial characteristics and other details that will help you remember individuals later. "Blank looking," according to Buzan, is a major cause of poor memory.
- **Listen.** Pay attention. Concentrate on the sound of the person's name. Don't concentrate on the fact that you never remember names.
- **Ask to hear the name again.** Even if you heard the name fairly well, say, "I'm sorry, would you mind repeating your name?" Repetition, advises Buzan, is a key memory aid.
- **Verify the pronunciation.** Ask if you have the right pronun-

> **You never get a second chance to make a good first impression.**

ciation of the person's name. Don't be embarrassed: Even a seemingly simple name might be pronounced in an unusual way, says Buzan. And once again, you'll get to repeat the name and burn it a little deeper into your memory.

- **Ask how it's spelled.** Here's another chance for repeating the name.
- **Ask about its derivation.** The person you meet usually is flattered that you're interested enough to ask about the history of his family name. This is another chance for repetition — but by adding more information to what you know about the person, you're also helping your memory be more effective.
- **Exchange cards.** Seeing the name in writing helps you remember. Later, incorporate the business cards you collect into your Rolodex, and you'll be another step ahead.
- **Repeat the name in conversation.** You'll involve the person more intimately in the conversation — and implant the name even further in your memory.
- **Repeat it internally.** During brief pauses in conversation, practice in your head the name you've heard. And during longer pauses, check up on yourself: Repeat the name again, and remind yourself of other details you've learned about the person.
- **Repeat it at parting.** As you say goodbye, use the person's name one final time.



Communication is essential for success

People often say things they don't mean and mean things they don't say. Speaking is like behavior. Just because a person knows what he or she intends to say doesn't mean that he or she has delivered the point. If the message isn't properly transmitted and received, good communication simply won't exist. We especially see this in the workplace as well as in our personal lives.

There are many reasons people fail to communicate properly. Here are 10 of them.

1. Prejudice. The listener has concluded . . . either before or during the speaker's remarks . . . that the speaker has nothing significant to say. The reason for such prejudices are many. Perhaps it could be the speaker's appearance, age, actions, voice, race, religion or nationality . . . to mention a few.

Is it real? Take the question of dress. Your appearance is so important because how you are perceived is how you're going to be treated. This is particularly so in your professional life.

2. Jumping to conclusions. The listener has decided that what the speaker is saying is too difficult, too trite, too boring or otherwise unsuited to his or her needs. Therefore, the listener feigns attentiveness while his or her mind is elsewhere.

3. Assumption. Many times, listeners assume they already

Making a good impression

Your reactions to situations leaves an indelible impression of the school district in action. If you're efficient, prompt and polite, the institution will be considered "on its toes." If you have the needed information at your fingertips, the institution is deemed "on the ball."

How do you turn yourself into an instant information bureau-rescue squad-host-diplomat?

- **Get organized.** Turn your desk into "communications central." Keep, within easy reach, lists of school telephone numbers, schedules of school activities, your boss' calendar, names of staff members, bus schedules, PTA offices and meetings.
- **Keep informed.** Know school policies like the back of your hand and your own responsibilities even better. Read the school and district handbooks cover to cover. If possible, go to faculty meetings. Circulate in the community. Read the newspaper and district newsletters and bulletins (and keep them on file), so that you know what problems board members and town council officers and budget cutters face and how they are dealing with them.
- **Use good judgment.** Know when to handle a public relations situation yourself, and when to pass it along to someone else on the staff.

— Reprinted from ***The Effective Educational Secretary,*** *by* ***Miriam M. Kline,*** *director of district support services, Hamburg Area School District, Berks Co., January 1989.*

know what the speaker is going to say, so their attention drifts elsewhere. As a result, they miss any new information the speaker may give.

4. **Closed mind.** When the listener decides that he or she already knows what the speaker is going to say, the listener simply decides not to listen.

5. **Inattention.** Most people speak about 125 words per minute,

while most of us can think at more than 400 words per minute. As a result, many listeners use the "spare time" to think of what they are going to say next. In the process, listeners often miss out on much of what the speaker says.

6. Selective listening. Listeners sometimes hear only what they want to hear. As the old saying goes, "what you think is what you hear."

7. Excessive talking. If a "listener" insists on monopolizing the conversation, he or she isn't going to hear very much. When Lyndon B. Johnson was a junior senator from Texas, he kept a sign on his wall which read "When you're talking you ain't learnin!"

8. Lack of empathy. Sometimes, a person cannot or will not see both sides of a point. Dogmatic people generally are poor listeners.

9. Fear. When a listener suspects what is about to be said, fear may result. Many times, he or she might stop listening and find a way to start an argument, or use some other means of escape.

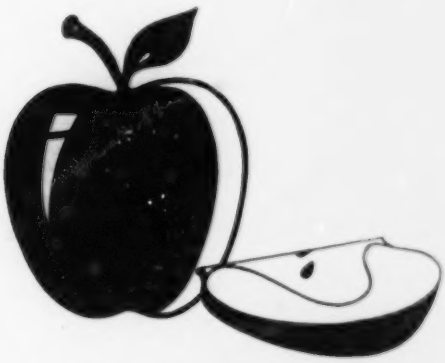
10. Different meanings. Many words have varied meanings. Sometimes, the listener can be confused, especially if the speaker doesn't make clear precisely what he or she intends to say.

Just remember, always say what you mean!

— Excerpted from an article in the Fall 1987 issue of ***The National Educational Secretary*** *by* ***Donna Guay,*** *professional color consultant.*

Chapter 3

Office Practices and School Relations



The fourth R

The fourth R has always been a part of the three Rs — reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic. It's **relations** — human relations. Educational office personnel are living examples of good basic human relations. How does this come about? They are, as it were, liaisons between principals and teachers, principals and pupils, parents and schools.

Educational secretaries bear a most important relationship to the principal in every school. It is said that the principal depends a bit on them to keep appointments straight, to clear up minor matters, to check on routine school matters. Secretaries have been known to remind principals that it's time for the monthly fire drill, the semi-annual report, the notices to parents and the principal's meeting. They often assume minor duties to relieve the principal for supervisory work.

In no place is this relationship more pronounced than in dealings with the teachers. It is secretaries who do those extra favors when there is a difficult situation. A cleverly worded note that the required health data are due before 3:15 p.m. helps teachers to save face. Then, too, if the schedule is full that day and a home must be notified at once, it is the helpful secretary who dials the number. What a relief it is to get that note regarding the pupil, not scratched on a bit of paper, but accurately typed.

When the supplies run low before the designated time, secretaries, like magicians, can always pull a few tablets out of their hats. They help, too, with those statistics that are the nemesis of

Your far-flung fan club

- Your own office colleagues
- Administrative staff — principal and assistants or superintendent and staff
- Support staff — custodians, aides, cooks, volunteers, bus drivers, nurses, counselors
- Teachers and student teachers
- Students
- Parents and nonparents
- School board members
- PTA and community club members
- Businesspeople, judges, clergy, social workers, attorneys
- Postal workers, emergency personnel and police
- Job applicants
- State and federal agency representatives

the average teacher. How quickly secretaries can locate data — be it a check, an assembly program of three years ago, or the cost of a book lost by a pupil. Their memory of telephone numbers is uncanny. If that fails, they produce a list of frequently dialed numbers.

The practices of educational secretaries in their relations with all children of all people are founded on a genuine liking for people. They are interested in the new baby sister, the honor roll, and the list of failures. The most talented pupil receives a smile the same as the problem child. Their clever fingers apply the band aid to the injured knee.

Either through training or divine gift, educational secretaries use personal objectivity in dealing with parents, allowing for understanding. They meet the confused, the tired, the irate, the grateful parents. Such meetings and greetings clear the air, define the issues, and pave the way for the conference with parents, child, principal, counselor or teacher. It is flattering to the willing mother and the reluctant father to have secretaries greet them by name. How do secretaries remember all those names? Is it the association method

The surest way to escape all criticism is to say nothing, do nothing and be nothing.

or have they developed a system all their own? No name stumps them — be it Crabtree, Porcher, Wieczkorswki, Breitenstin, Luppenetti or Smith.

Their desks, too, live up to their jobs. Whoever saw a secretary's desk without a rose, a decorative vase or an amusing gadget, be it a puzzle or an hourglass? There is an air of camaraderie between secretaries, a realistic give-and-take relationship. Secretaries smile not only at the principal, the teacher, the parent and the pupil, but at other secretaries too. They keep faith with all groups.

More and more, we see the importance of the relationship of the individual to the group in successful school living. School secretaries exemplify this to a great degree. They make the wheels turn, they throw oil on troubled waters. As Tiny Tim said many years ago, "God bless them every one."

— Reprinted from ***The Effective Educational Secretary****, Hamburg Area School District, Berks Co.; originally printed in* ***Recollections****, National Association of Educational Office Personnel, 1977.*

10 Cs for success in the educational workplace

Each school day is filled with the "unknown" and the "unexpected." It is filled with emotions of excitement, frustration, joy and tears. And you love every minute of every day. You are fulfilled and content in your job. If the last two sentences are true, congratulations! You need not read further because you already are using the 10 Cs for success in your school job.

If you need a little assistance to be more successful, try these ideas.

1. Care — Care about all of the people who enter your school. A warm cheerful smile, a pleasant "good morning" or a sincere "how are you?" will demonstrate your thoughtfulness. Try to greet each person by name. Be compassionate with those you encounter daily. Compassion is a must in the caring process.

2. Cooperate — Cooperation is working together toward a common end or purpose. Cooperate on a project with someone that you are not particularly fond of.

3. Communicate — Say it correctly. Be certain your comments are directed to the proper audience. Make certain the comments are factual. Say what you mean.

4. Conciseness — Do not ramble in writing or in speaking.

40

You make a difference

"It is my firm belief that the educational secretary has the greatest challenge that any secretary could possibly have — that of working with children. It has been said that a hundred years from now it will not matter in what kind of house we lived, or what kind of car we drove, or where we spent our vacation; but the world could be a different place because we were important in the life of a child. No matter from which side of the tracks this child may come, the system of free public education has always been and must continue to be his hope for success, for opportunity, and for the way of making sure that his strength will contribute to the strength of America. We in the field of education — educators and secretaries alike — must keep this in mind as we pursue our individual responsibilities. The world could be a different place because we were important in the life of a child."

— ***Louis Bruno,*** *superintendent of public instruction, State of Washington*

Give your decision rather than your reason; your decision may be right, your reason will surely not satisfy everyone.

5. Commitment — In your particular job, you are either involved or committed. In the school business, we are committed.

6. Consistency — Do it the same way for all people. "I am sure we can resolve this problem for you," makes no commitment, but will satisfy an upset person until the problem can be settled. Exceptions to the rule will only cause more problems for you later.

7. Contribution — Be an active participant. Give of yourself, time and talent willingly. Make the workplace better because you are there and doing something positive to make the process work. Praise of another's effort or achievement can be motivation for higher accomplishments. When dealing with others, focus your attention on "you" rather than "I."

8. Concern — Show genuine interest in the needs of others. Be a good listener. Don't react on the first impulse. Be objective in

your thinking. Think the process through to a logical conclusion before you act.

9. Confirm — When everything works on the schedule that you established and confirmed, all parties involved in the issue will be happy because it worked well. Your boss will be perceived to be competent, and you will be perceived to be efficient.

10. Cope — Be positive and welcome each day as it emerges with its new challenges to be enjoyed and to be conquered.

And here's a "bonus C." **Consider the consequences** — Before you render a decision, consider the consequences of that decision. This little thought may cause you to reconsider or it may give you insight to make a better decision. However, once the decision is made, stick with it and live with it.

The consequences of using the 10 Cs and the bonus C effectively can and will make you a super educational secretary. In fact, the consequences may even make you the perfect educational secretary. Congratulations!

— Excerpted from an article by ***Gary Crissman****, assistant superintendent in the Central Dauphin School District, Dauphin Co., in* ***The National Educational Secretary****, Summer 1988.*

What does your principal really want?

If your principal were asked to respond to the following questions, would you know what the answers would be? "What are the five most important things a secretary can do to help you get your job done?" "How would you rate your secretary's effectiveness, using a scale of excellent, good, fair or poor?"

According to responses to a survey of principals and secretaries, two significant factors were revealed, along with some steps and techniques to ensure a positive working relationship between principal and secretary.

The principals' responses revealed that principals and school secretaries who worked well together began their working relationship by communicating needs and expectations. That openness continued and established a process that helped them negotiate differences.

On the other hand, principals and secretaries who had not developed a process for sharing expectations regarding the work process ran into constant difficulties. Minor problems became confrontations, with each becoming firmly entrenched and seemingly resistant to change.

Conflict can be contagious and have a significant impact on the effectiveness of school operations. Dissention takes energy,

Desirable qualities in a secretary

From a survey of more than 200 employers, here's what they feel are desirable qualities in a secretary. Note that the ones voiced most often fall into the human relations category.

- Cheerfulness; interest in the school; promptness; desire to help.
- Keeps confidences.
- Creates goodwill in the school family.
- Available at all times.
- Screens telephone calls and callers tactfully.
- Relieves employer of routine and details; takes care of minor problems.
- Organizes flow of mail; edits letters carefully; composes routine letters.

which is then not available to help students, teachers and administrators. Moreover, principals who had difficult working relationships with secretaries revealed they often did some of their own clerical work to avoid arguments, thereby causing them to divert energy from instructional excellence.

An analysis of the survey responses revealed the following behaviors that principals would like from educational secretaries.

• **Support** — The school office often proves to be the principals' only sanctuary from the pressures of dealing with unhappy faculties and demanding parents. An office staff that does not judge decisions or policies of the principal provides a retreat and enables the principal to fortify resources and more readily rise to demanding situations.

• **Structure** — When time is wisely used, deadlines met and accuracy assured, principals receive an additional element of support. They can focus their energies on being the instructional leaders when they aren't worried whether reports are completed accurately and submitted on time.

• **Open communication** — Cited by principals and secretaries alike as a crucial element in effective working relationships, prin-

cipals wanted to be able to be candid with their school secretaries. Such a cooperative effort helps build a team spirit, with all members comfortable sitting down and discussing problems.

- **Informality** — Although principals and secretaries show respect for each other, informality in the office allows for warm greetings and helpful and spontaneous responses.
- **Defined areas of responsibility** — Principals don't want educational secretaries to be over-controlling of resources, although they don't want the secretaries to come to them for every issue.

Steps to positive working relationships

Harmonious working relationships result in pleasantness and productivity. The following steps and techniques emerge as processes that the successful principal-educational secretary team can use to ensure a positive working relationship.

Step 1: Understand the goals of the district and the school. As office supervisor, it is essential for the educational secretary to know the educational philosophy of the principal, which provides a framework to view how your job fits into the total picture.

Step 2: Clarify your responsibilities through the use of three job descriptions (one prepared by the district, the other delineating how you believe the job is to be performed, and the third drafted by your principal). These three documents can serve as a point of departure with you and your principal regarding your job responsibilities. Sometimes people exert a great deal of energy doing the wrong thing and are then disappointed when their efforts aren't appreciated.

Step 3: Work together to identify the behaviors that will transform the combined job descriptions into exemplary, productive performance. Most job descriptions are written as traits (e.g., flexible, reliable, good attitude). What they do is cause confusion, what they don't do is provide clarity about what behaviors constitute a good job. Well-defined job descriptions that use behavioral descriptors provide the new and veteran employee with clarity on what is ex-

pected and provide a visual image of what it will look like when it is done correctly.

Step 4: Indicate how you believe these behaviors support and complement your principal. A common complaint voiced by principals was that the school secretaries always appeared busy, but were not necessarily getting the job done. Since the school secretary was working hard, it was not a reluctance to work but an error in where to place the energy.

Step 5: Periodically ask your principal to share his or her perception of what the job entails. This activity helps to clarify any misunderstandings or misinterpretations and gives you both the opportunity to focus on what is needed to get the job done.

Step 6: Encourage feedback and request time to meet regularly to eliminate the frequent complaint expressed that there is not enough time. Not having time only leads to fulfilling the old adage: We never have time enough to do the job, but always seem to have time to do it over.

Step 7: Plan daily five-minute stand-up meetings at the beginning of the day. Each has the opportunity to alert the other about possible problems, to clarify questions from the prior day, and to reaffirm the bonds of teamwork. One of the definitions of team is mutual interdependence. Clearly there is no greater example of teaming than when the principal and educational secretary work together to enhance the performance of each other.

Step 8: Encourage the principal to support the role of the secretary by asking to be introduced to staff, faculty and parents. Moreover, demonstrate your role as office supervisor by ensuring that you perform the responsibilities of supervising and evaluating the office staff.

Step 9: Be open to changing roles and responsibilities. The job of educational secretary is not static. It is closely aligned to the changing role of the site administrator. Be alert to the responsibilities that the administrator can delegate to you. Such a transfer not only frees the principal, but provides job enrichment to you. Ex-

pansion of duties can provide variety to offset the danger of the job becoming routine.

Step 10: Be attentive to the bonds of loyalty that seal the working relationship. Aside from open communication, no other

Small details make a big difference

Just about everything worthwhile you accomplish is really the combined result of a lot of details. When you overlook one of those details, your whole effort may fail.

You've probably heard the old saying: "For want of a nail, the shoe was lost. For want of a shoe, the horse was lost. And for want of a horse, the rider was lost." An English poet named George Herbert wrote it almost 400 years ago.

When Ben Franklin quoted it in his *Poor Richard's Almanac*, he added: "A little neglect may breed great mischief." And he was so right. You can see countless examples of how the smallest detail can mean the difference between success or failure of an important project.

Just think how thoroughly experts check and recheck hundreds of details before every space flight. Failure of a tiny electronic or mechanical part could abort a mission or even cost the lives of astronauts.

Neglecting details can have equally serious repercussions in your life. If you overlook a minor malfunction in your car, it may lead to much costlier repairs — or even an accident or injury. Ignoring a minor problem with an electric or gas appliance in your home might end up in a big repair bill, or even a fire or explosion.

Overlooking small details on the job can lead to more serious failures. Simply forgetting to pass along a phone message can be costly. Taking routine precautions and attending to routine problems concerning your work, the equipment and the materials is always important.

No detail is so routine that you can just thoughtlessly overlook it.

Time wasters

External	Internal
1. Telephone interruptions	1. Procrastination
2. Meetings	2. Failure to delegate
3. Visitors	3. Unclear objectives
4. Socializing	4. Failure to set priorities
5. Lack of information	5. Crisis management
6. Excessive paperwork	6. Failure to plan
7. Communication breakdowns	7. Poor scheduling
8. Lack of policies and procedures	8. Lack of self-discipline
9. Lack of competent personnel	9. Attempting to do too much at one time
10. Red tape	10. Lack of relevant skills

*— **The Money Lists: A Collection of Fascinating Fiscal Facts,** Jeffrey Feinman.*

factor was consistently mentioned by principals and school secretaries. Each may see the weakness of the other; that knowledge can provide a bond of support. If handled inappropriately, it can be the element that destroys the working relationship.

Building a team is an ongoing, dynamic experience. It requires an investment in energy and time. Yet it is one investment that provides enormous benefits.

*— Excerpted from an article in the Summer 1988 issue of **The National Educational Secretary** written by **Dr. R. Carol Sweeney,** associate professor and educational administrator at California State University, Los Angeles, CA.*

So who's perfect?

When I am criticized, I get mad, feel hurt, get quiet, walk out, cry, feel sorry for myself, become defensive . . . What do you do? Why? We have been taught that criticism is negative. Most people give criticism in a negative way; therefore, we react negatively to it. The thrust is negative; the reaction is negative. We resent criticism because it might be true or because it lowers our dignity.

The adage "Sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never harm me" is way off target. Words can do more lasting damage than most physical blows.

We've been told to "take criticism constructively," but not how to do it. Taking criticism constructively meant pretending your feelings were not hurt, curbing your irritiation, and pretending agreement. Criticisms are generally not a statement of fact and almost always are unfavorable. If someone says, "don't take this personally," watch out. Criticism is personal **and** painful if directed toward our ability, judgment, competence or integrity.

No one enjoys taking criticism, and virtually everyone finds it difficult and embarrassing to accept — especially when the critic is a person important to our lives — a boss, a friend, a lover, a spouse. Most of us would like to be able to react to criticisms calmly, but few can. Our defenses are triggered and we react angrily, and the critics believe they have touched a truth. Or we respond defensively and resentfully, making a reasonable discussion difficult.

Tips on working more efficiently

Following is a collection of tips from various time-management authorities. They probably won't change your life, but some of them may help you work more efficiently and eventually become somewhat less behind.

- Keep a daily "to-do" list and check off jobs as you finish them. This is obvious, but time management people agree it's the key to getting things done.
- Examine routine procedures with an eye to streamlining and making them more efficient. Try to see your working patterns with a fresh eye.
- Look ahead for ways to take care of more than one matter with each trip, telephone call, meeting, letter.
- Travel in big circles. When you leave your office, plan a circular route that will take care of as many errands as possible on the way to where you're going and back.
- Don't write a letter if a telephone call or brief note would do as well.
- List all the telephone calls you know you'll have to make in a day and make them in one or two batches.
- Keep a box or drawer of those non-urgent jobs that take only a few minutes. Do one or two when you have 10 minutes, or do a batch when you're not alert enough to take on a major project. The key is to have them readily at hand.
- Alternate different types of work — for example, after a long stretch of desk work, stop and make telephone calls.
- Set phony deadlines, earlier than the real ones. Depending on how good you are at kidding yourself, this will keep you ahead of schedule.
- Plan projects step by step, so when you've finished one step, you don't have to stop and figure out what to do next.
- Handle each piece of paper only once. Process it, file it — or boldly throw it away.
- If you're not good at a particular job, try to find someone else to do it; trade tasks with a colleague or find a volunteer.

Learning how to accept criticism effectively gives you an important source of personal feedback and a vital tool for personal growth. The fact is you are going to get and need criticism as long as you interact with others. Society could not exist without criticism. Constructive criticism, accompanied by suggestions for improvement, accelerates advancement.

Originally, criticism was meant to denote a neutral, objective appraisal of ideas and actions. Today, if you were asked to define criticism you would probably say it is destructive, humiliating and fault finding. Let's consider these definitions:

- **Criticize:** to communicate information to others in a way that enables them to use it to their advantage and benefit.
- **Criticism:** a tool to encourage and enhance personal and professional growth relationships.

It is important to develop skills to:

- Think of criticism as a course of new information.
- Channel emotional energy aroused by criticism into fruitful avenues.
- Take steps to change.

These guidelines are a path toward developing these skills.

Dos

1. Identifying what's happening. Make sure you understand exactly what has been said. Ask yourself, "Have I really been criticized?"

2. Be aware of your own feelings. Work through the feelings until you are able to respond with less emotion.

3. Be open to the possibility that the criticism may prove to be helpful. Ask yourself, "What can I learn from the criticism to improve my performance, competence, and self-esteem?"

4. Take charge of yourself and the situation. Level with the critic. Try to turn a one-sided confrontation into a dialogue.

5. Agree with the truth in the statement. Agree in principle; this allows you to remain the judge of what you do.

6. Consider the source. How credible and how important is the source to you?

7. Consider the timing of the criticism. If not an appropriate time and place, delay conversation.

Don'ts

1. Don't jump to conclusions. Don't assume you are guilty.

2. Don't let your feelings block the message. You could react inappropriately.

3. Don't counterattack. Don't try to make the critic feel guilty or place the blame on someone else.

4. Don't allow the situation to control your behavior. Don't respond to vague criticisms or past faults.

5. Don't expect instant success. Solutions take time and thought.

6. Don't try to deal with the situation if it is not needed. Give it time and thought.

7. Don't get hooked into a quick response. It will be defensive.

8. Don't expect your reply to change the person. The critic is not prepared to be wrong.

9. Don't get involved in a lengthy reply. You may want more time to think about it.

Some people under criticism develop a feeling of persecution. Criticism is not measured by the degree in which it hurts, or by the motive of the critic, but by its rightness.

We all have our individual "tender spots." We will take all manner of abuse in many areas of our lives, but usually there is one where the least breath of criticism hurts.

One calming thought for most of us when subjected to criticism might be: "He little knew my other faults, or he would not have mentioned only these."

Giving and receiving criticism are both difficult; however, an old adage continues to surface: "It is better to give than receive."

— Reprinted from the Winter 1987 issue of ***The National Educational Secretary,*** *by* ***Margaret Davis,*** *staff development inservice training technician for the Wichita (KS) Public Schools.*

Gossip

My name is gossip. I have no respect for justice.
I maim without killing. I break hearts and ruin lives.
I am cunning and malicious and gather strength with age.
The more I am quoted the more I am believed.
I flourish at every level of society.
My victims are helpless. They cannot protect themselves against me because I have no name and no face.
To track me down is impossible. The harder you try, the more elusive I become.
I am nobody's friend.
Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same.
I topple governments and wreck marriages.
I ruin careers and cause sleepness nights, heartache and indigestion.
I make innocent people cry in their pillows.
Even my name hisses. I am called Gossip. Office gossip. Shop gossip. Party gossip. Telephone gossip. I make headlines and headaches. Before you repeat a story ask yourself, is it true? Is it fair? Is it necessary? If not — SHUT UP.

— *Author unknown*

How to manage your boss

Your boss may not always be pleasant, cooperative or complimentary. In fact, bosses usually can be categorized into one of the following five types.

Categories of bad bosses

1. The Quiet Boss. This boss hates to communicate with the staff — is a loner, preferring to talk only to a few people in the department; never involves subordinates in planning the department's activities.

The silent boss can make things particularly difficult for new employees who don't recognize the style. The silent boss often suddenly remembers reports or projects that must be completed and thus creates small panics. The boss who dumps projects at the last minutes does so because there is no real communication with the staff and the boss lets the project drift.

2. The Semi-Retired Boss. This type is found in many organizations. Faced with a decision, the semi-retired boss plays it safe. If there's to be a committee meeting, this boss finds out the sentiment of the members in advance and goes along with it.

Semi-retired bosses often brag of having survived many organizational crises and management upheavals. They tell their staff to keep a low profile.

3. The Carper. As the name implies, this boss constantly finds fault. No assignment is ever handled satisfactorily; thanks and compliments are never given. Perceptive subordinates recognize the deep problem — a lack of self-confidence. Learning how to toss a compliment the boss's way may work wonders.

4. The Slave Driver. This modern version of Simon Legree is easy to identify, demanding long hours and hard work with a strictly authoritarian approach. The slave driver boss may try to control all information and may even demand to see all correspondence before it leaves the department. This type of boss hardly ever gives praise. Of all kinds of bosses, the slave driver is the most difficult.

5. The Super-Praiser. This boss wants to be known as "Mr. Nice Guy" and tries to win popularity by constantly handing out praise. People joining the staff of a backslapper can hardly believe their luck — acquiring a boss who is so even tempered, so generous with credit. Soon, however, problems begin to surface.

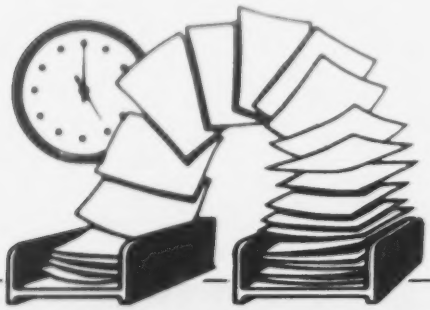
Super-praisers create large problems for organizations. They avoid conflict and never fire an employee. Their aim is to have a staff that is happy — and they end up creating a staff that is disorganized and often riddled with morale problems. More than 15% of managers tend to be backslappers, thus constituting a large group.

Dealing with problem bosses

Developing a strategy for dealing with problem bosses is not usually as simple as tossing a bouquet. Instead of fastening on quick fixes, psychologists say, an office professional ought to give serious thought to developing a long-range plan. Here are eight steps that are worth considering in developing such a strategy.

1. Recognize that some conflict is inherent in the relationship between boss and subordinate. More things divide the boss from subordinates than unite them. Their status is different. Their responsibilities are different. Except in rare cases, the boss makes a higher salary. Goals are different. Recognizing that a certain amount of conflict is inherent in the boss-subordinate relationship should help bring more objectivity to the situation. It will, at the minimum, help keep the subordinate from taking rash actions.

2. Make an honest evaluation of the boss. All bosses have strengths to go along with their apparent weaknesses. The subordinate should recognize the good points as well as the drawbacks. Making a rating sheet, using all your pet theories about what



Time management

Good time management comes in four areas:

- Management of self — know who you are.
- Management of others — accept them and work with them.
- Management of facilities, equipment, working areas.
- Management of hours — what's right for you has to be determined by you.

makes a good to great boss, is likely to help you discover strengths gone unappreciated in the boss. With a truly difficult boss, go one step further and examine yourself as well. What do you do consciously or unconsciously that may irritate the boss? What about your work habits? Has anyone else criticized your performance?

Finally, it may be worth rating the relationship itself. What constitutes a good relationship between an office professional and a boss? The basic elements appear to be mutual respect, mutual approval, mutual stimulation, and a more or less tension-free personal relationship. How does your relationship stack up?

3. Lower your expectations of the boss. Relations between a boss and office professionals may deteriorate simply because the subordinate expects too much. Often we want the boss to "take care of us," we expect perfection, not just professionally but personally as well. Remind yourself of one thing: No one, including the boss, can have all your interests at heart, at all times. Remember, you were hired to perform specific tasks. The boss has a right

to be judged primarily on how those tasks are overseen. Anything else the boss gives is a plus.

4. Discover the boss's objectives. One time-honored route to success in managing the boss is to discover what his or her real goals are. Often you can discover your boss's real goals simply by observing how he works with his boss. Your boss, after all, has somehow discovered his boss's goals. His own goals are not likely to be much different.

Educational office professionals can support their boss's objectives by reading specialized publications in education and highlighting relevant topics. The burden of executive reading is extremely heavy and most executives would welcome such help.

5. Be aware of changing goals. Once you've discovered the boss's true goals, however, don't stay on that course forever. Bosses change frequently and so do boss's objectives. Frequent goal changing at the top means that all down-the-line objectives must shift.

6. Open up lines of communication. One of the most useful techniques for managing the boss is that of bearing the news — both bad and good. An ancient bit of management wisdom goes: "Never surprise the boss." That means the boss shouldn't hear bad news from someone outside the school. Office professionals are in an excellent position to hear things the boss doesn't know. If news items affect the school, your assistance in keeping the boss informed of matters current on the grapevine could be appreciated. But some selectivity is required. Don't run to tell your boss that the paper towel dispenser is empty.

7. Give the boss positive feedback. One improvement almost anyone can make in the boss-managing technique is to be more positive in day-to-day relations with the boss. By giving the boss positive feedback — in effect, rewarding the boss with praise — the boss may be led to modify behavior.

8. Find ways to express loyalty. A wise subordinate will go out of the way to say a good word about the boss and how he or she directs the school — assuming it is honestly felt. Displays of loyalty are bound to get back to the boss and will be appreciated. Difficult bosses change their attitudes toward subordinates quickly when loyalty is demonstrated. From the subordinates' standpoint, it's another way to get closer to the boss and to gain an understanding of the boss's goals.

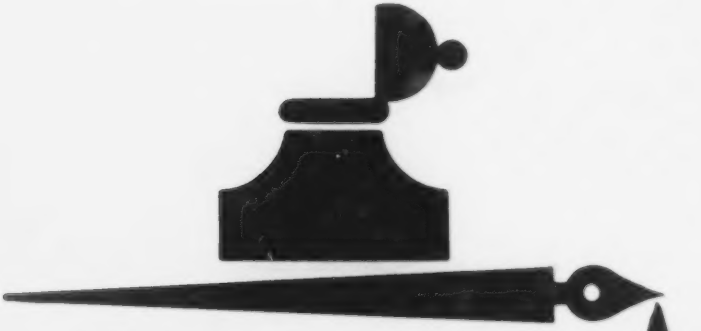
Patience is the ability to idle your motor when you feel like stripping your gears.

When nothing works

Suppose you've tried to manage your boss and nothing seems to work. And a change in assignment within the school doesn't seem feasible.

The last ditch solution, of course, is to look for another job. In a new situation you'll have a better chance to draw a better boss. And, based on your experience, you'll be more sensitive to potential problems the next time around.

— Excerpted from ***The Office Professional,*** *a newsletter of Professional Training Associates, Round Rock, TX, June 15, 1985.*



Writing correctness: It does make a difference

Many educators will agree that communication skills deserve a high priority. Agreement is not so uniform, however, when these same people are asked to describe what constitutes communication skills.

Communication skills must certainly include all the elements of writing, speaking and sending nonverbal cues in the transmitting of messages. Good communicators know that their messages should be clear enough that they do not require their receivers possess special skills as interpreters.

Most of us rely on our memories of rules taught somewhere between fourth and eighth grades or in a college English class. Chances are you remember one (and only one) spelling rule, which helps you to spell correctly such words as *receive* and *retrieve*. What about all the other spelling rules? And how about the rules of punctuation and grammar?

Punctuation

Punctuation marks are writing tools that help you turn raw material (words) into meaningful ideas.

• **Commas,** for example, are used to set off and to separate. They have no other functions. By inserting or omitting commas properly, we can indicate whether appositives or other sentence ele-

ments are restrictive or nonrestrictive. The sentence "My brother James lives in Denver" indicates that I have more than one brother; James, therefore, is restrictive. The sentence "My brother, James, lives in Denver" indicates that I have only one brother. There, James is nonrestrictive.

Observe how the following sentence may be punctuated three different ways to achieve the desired emphasis:

- The three branches, all from the Glenville District, qualified for the award.
- The three branches — all from the Glenville District — qualified for the award.
- The three branches (all from the Glenville District) qualified

Proofread carefully

We all make mistakes, but they're never more glaringly apparent than when they appear in print. A typo here, a misspelling there, can transform an otherwise well-researched article or report into an 8½"×11" embarrassing reflection of your credibility.

Proofreading your work prevents situations like this from occurring. By careful proofreading, you will be able to locate and correct your errors before they find their way into print.

To begin with, read through the entire copy to be sure everything makes sense. Watch for: incomplete sentences, any words that may have been omitted, false comparisons and faulty parallels, too many words to describe one idea, and unnecessary repetition of the same word(s).

Once you've done that, check and verify all names, dates, addresses and statistics. An error here could prove disastrous.

Finally, use this simple but effective method to check for typos and misspellings: Read backwards, word for word, from the end of the copy to the beginning. You'll be surprised at how reversing the way you normally read will help you locate errors you otherwise might have missed.

for the award. (This sentence **de-emphasizes** the location of the three branches.)

Another important use of the comma is to separate items in a series. Use commas to separate elements in a series, but do not put a comma before the conjunction in a simple series: "The flag is red, white and blue." Put the comma before the concluding conjunction in a series, however, if an integral element of the series requires a conjunction: "I had orange juice, toast, and ham and eggs for breakfast." Use a comma also before the concluding conjunction in a complex series of phrases: "The main points to consider are whether the athletes are skillful enough to compete, whether they have the stamina to endure the training, and whether they have the proper mental attitude."

In a series of adjectives equal in rank, use commas to separate the adjectives. If the commas could be replaced by the word *and* without changing the sense, the adjectives are equal: "a thoughtful, precise manner; a dark, dangerous street."

A comma normally is used to separate an introductory clause or phrase from a main clause: "When he had tired of the mad pace of New York, he moved to Dubuque." The comma may be omitted after short introductory phrases if no ambiguity would result: "During the night he heard many noises." But use the comma if its omission would slow comprehension: "On the street below, the curious gathered."

• **Semicolon** — In general, use the semicolon to indicate a greater separation of thought and information than a comma can convey but less than the separation that a period implies.

To clarify a series, use semicolons to separate elements of the series when individual segments contain material that also must be set off by commas: "He leaves a son, John Smith of Chicago; three daughters, Jane Smith of Wichita, Kansas, Mary Smith of Denver, and Susan, wife of William Kingsbury of Boston; and a sister, Martha, wife of Robert Warren of Omaha, Nebraska. **Note that the semicolon is used before the final *and* in such a series.**

Use a semicolon when a coordinating conjunction such as *and, but* or *for* is not present: "The package was due last week; it arrived today." If a coordinating conjunction is present, use a semicolon before it only if extensive punctuation also is required in one or more of the individual clauses: "They pulled their boats from

the water, sandbagged the retaining walls, and boarded up the windows; but even with these precautions, the island was hard-hit by the hurricane."

• **Colon** — The most frequent use of the colon is at the end of a sentence to introduce lists, tabulations, texts, etc. Capitalize the first word after a colon **only** if it is a proper noun or the start of a complete sentence: "He promised this: The company will make good all the losses." But: "There were three considerations: expense, time and feasibility." Colons also are often used to give emphasis: "He had only one hobby: eating."

• **Quotation Marks** — For running quotations, if a full paragraph of quoted material is followed by a paragraph that continues the quotation, do not put close-quote marks at the end of the first paragraph. Do, however, put open-quote marks at the start of the second paragraph. Continue in this fashion for any succeeding paragraphs, using close-quote marks only at the end of the quoted material.

If a paragraph does not start with quotation marks but ends with a quotation that is continued in the next paragraph, do not use close-quote marks at the end of the introductory paragraph if the quoted material constitutes a full sentence. Use close-quote marks, however, if the quoted material does not constitute a full sentence. For example:

He said, "I am shocked and horrified by the incident.

"I am so horrified, in fact, that I will ask for the death penalty."

But:

He said he was "shocked and horrified by the incident."

"I am so horrified, in fact, that I will ask for the death penalty," he said.

Alternate between double quotation marks ("or") and single marks ('or') when you have quotes within quotes. Example: "I quote from his letter, 'I agree with Kipling that the "female of the species is more deadly than the male," but the phenomenon is not an unchangeable law of nature,' a remark he did not explain." Use three marks together if two quoted elements end at the same time: "He told me, 'I love you.' "

These guidelines will not be useful if you can't identify a

Avoiding sexism in writing

Many of us were taught in grammar school that calling everybody *he* was elegant and correct. Well, it still is, but, here are 12 simple rules for handling this troublesome situation.

1. **Pluralize.**
2. **Use *they, them* and *their* with sex-indefinite nouns and pronouns.**
3. **Revise the sentence.**
4. **Delete the pronoun.**
5. **Substitute an article (a, an, the) for *his*.**
6. **Repeat the noun.**
7. **Use a synonym.**
8. **Compound the sentence so repeating the pronoun is unnecessary.**
9. **Compound pronouns (*she* or *he, his* or *hers*) or alternate examples.**
10. **Substitute *you (your)*.**
11. **Substitute *I (me, my)*.**
12. **Substitute *one (one's)*.**

clause. A **clause** is a group of related words that has a subject and a verb. A **phrase** is a group of related words that does not have a subject and a verb.

Grammar

Correct correlation of subjects and verbs is the primary principle of grammar. Knowing that singular subjects require singular verbs is logical and acceptable to almost everyone. The problem we face, however, is that we often do not recognize the real subjects of our sentences and carelessly match them with incorrect verbs. In the following sentences, the subjects are in bold, and the verbs are in italics.

- **Each** of the women *was asked* to testify.

Write it right

Writers often consider two elements of writing to be a nuisance: punctuation and mechanics (capitalization, abbreviation, enumeration, hyphenation, etc.). But, of course, correct punctuation and mechanics are necessary for clarity. Moreover, punctuation deserves special attention because it plays a special role in helping the reader understand the meaning of a sentence or passage.

Punctuation marks tell the reader how to read the words in a sentence. For example, punctuation marks tell the reader when to pause, whether a word or words are being omitted or emphasized, which items or words belong together, when a thought is complete, or whether a sentence is a statement or question. Faulty punctuation, however, can confuse readers, causing them to misunderstand or forcing them to re-read a sentence or passage to get the writer's intended meaning.

Read the following sentences to see how important punctuation is to meaning: "Woman — without her, man is lost." "Woman without her man is lost."

To help you choose the correct punctuation in your writing, remember that your goal is to help your reader understand how to read your words. It also will help to understand that punctuation in writing replaces pacing and inflection in speaking.

Most important, however, is to keep your writing simple and straightforward. Such writing is not only easier to understand but also easier to punctuate correctly. In fact, if you have trouble deciding what punctuation is necessary, the real trouble may be that you've written an overly complicated, incorrect or awkward sentence. Rewriting may be better than struggling to find the right punctuation.

And finally, you should have a good reference text to consult whenever you are uncertain about grammar.

— Reprinted from ***The Effective Educational Secretary****, Hamburg Area School District, Berks Co.; originally printed in* ***The Quill Pen Pal****, December 1987.*

- **All** of the women *were asked* to testify.
- **Neither** of the students *is going* on the field trip.
- It *took* the **committee** three hours to reach a decision.

The last sentence in the group is very weak because **it** appears to be the subject. However, **it** is a meaningless word (called an expletive). You should rewrite this sentence as, "The committee took three hours to reach a decision." The words **there** and **it** are used often as expletives, resulting in very weak writing. The subject of a sentence is one of the two most important words in the sentence; therefore, choose meaningful words for this function.

The problem of matching words increases when you need to pair pronouns with antecedents. The following sentences are incorrect. How often do you hear or read this kind of misuse of the language?

- "Each of the members expressed their opinion." To correct this, change **each** (singular) to **all** (plural) and change **opinion** to **opinions.** Notice that by changing the antecedent to the plural form, you eliminate the problem with sexist language that results if you change **their** to the traditional **his.** You also avoid the awkward **his/her** in these kinds of expressions.
- "Westco Supply is having their annual Spring Sale this week." To correct this, change **their** to **its.**

— Reprinted from ***The Effective Educational Secretary,*** *Hamburg Area School District, Berks Co.; originally printed in* ***The National Educational Secretary,*** *National Association of Educational Office Personnel.*

A new kind of tickler file

Do you often wish you had a sure-fire memory system that you could use to remind staff members about due dates, appointments, meeting times and countless other commitments? Most educational secretaries do, for it's well-nigh impossible to remember the details of everyone's schedule and remind them of their obligations at the precise moment that these responsibilities should be recalled.

We can't give you an infallible memory. But we can offer you the next best thing: A device that will help you to remind . . .

The boss of:

- Due dates for records and reports.
- Committee meetings.
- Observations to be made.
- Personnel to be rated.
- Pupils to be interviewed.
- Scheduled appointments.
- Conferences with teachers.
- School plant maintenance needs.

The faculty of:

- Dates on which reports are due in the office.
- Dates when requisitions are due.
- Staff meetings.

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The school physician of:

- Vaccinations that must be inspected.
- Children who have been ill.
- Children who need medical examinations for specific reasons.
- Children who have been injured.

The custodian when:

- The building will be used for special events.
- Workers are due.
- Equipment requiring installation has been ordered.
- Special areas need attention.

The police when:

- School will be dismissed early.
- Special events take place that require coverage.

We could go on and on and still not exhaust the list of people that you must remind to do certain tasks or things that you must remember to do yourself.

True enough, every educational secretary keeps a desk calendar, possibly an activities calendar or similar loose-leaf notebook, an appointment book and some form of tickler file. Here's how to make a new type of tickler file — one that will serve as an automatic memory and save you hours of work and much frustration.

How to make this file

To build this file, use a library-type transfer case 10½"×5" — durable enough to withstand years of hard use. On the front flap, which opens when you lift the lid, attach a piece of cellophane or celluloid with cellophane tape. The celluloid should be the same size as the flap itself.

Under the left side of the celluloid, insert a 3"×5" card listing routine reports that are due every month together with the due dates. Label this card "Routine Monthly Reports." Then prepare a dozen 3"×5" cards that list the special reports due during each of the 12 months. Label these cards "Special Reports Due In (month)." Insert this pack of cards under the right side of the celluloid. When you open the box you can see at a glance the dates on which specific reports for the current month are due.

The next step is to make a file folder for every month of the year. Cut the names of the months from a calendar to give your file a professional look. Make 31 similar-size folders — one for each of the days in the longest months of the year. Number these 1-31, again using a calendar to obtain the numbers. After you finish making these folders, place a piece of tape over the name or number to cover it completely. Then fold the remainder of the tape over the back of the folder in order to reinforce it and protect the tabs.

Finally, organize the file so that the current month, say March, with a guide card for each day, is in front. Then place the remaining monthly folders in the file in their proper order. Then, on March 31, empty out the April folder and place the reminders for April in the appropriate daily folders. Take the April folder and file it behind the other monthly folders. The folder for May will then be in the front of the monthly file.

How the file works

To make this file work efficiently, take time to prepare the raw materials carefully. Now consider these four points.

1. If you want to remember to do a particular thing on a certain date, note it on a piece of paper, preferably 8½"×11", drop it in the folder for that month and forget about it.

For example, if your boss says: "Remind me to order a bulletin board for Room 10 the next time our requisition is due." Make a notation and drop it in the folder for the month during which requisitions are forwarded.

On the last day of the each month take the folder for the next month and arrange the contents according to due dates. Be sure to allow sufficient time to complete each task. All the reminders then will be organized according to the date on which they are due.

2. If you send instructions telling a teacher how to compile a report that is due once or twice a year, staple a copy of the instructions to a blank copy of the report and file it in the folder for the month in which it is next due. If the instructions do not produce the desired results and you or your boss want to word the instructions differently next time, make the needed corrections in red on the original note before filing. Instead of trying to recall the

changes several months hence you have already recorded them and they are ready when needed.

3. Two copies of routine letters to be sent out either by your boss or a delegated member of the faculty should be filed in the folder for the month preceding the due date. At the proper time give the responsible person a copy of the letter to determine if any changes are necessary. Be sure to retain one copy in the file in case the first copy is lost or mislaid. When you receive the corrected copy have it duplicated for distribution.

4. In the front of the file keep a folder marked "Work for Substitute." In this folder place work that a substitute can do without too much instruction — typing, photocopying, etc. Then if you should be unexpectedly absent your boss will have some work he can assign to the substitute, whose time will not be wasted, and you will benefit by the tasks completed.

— Excerpted from ***The National Educational Secretary****, Fall 1988, by* ***Louise Henderson Nelson****, NAEOP president emeritus.*

Chapter 4

Self-Help Tips and Reminders

Developing a 'you'

Each of us needs successful experiences to develop a good self-image and there are certain ways to lay the groundwork for such experiences.

- **Be dignified** — Project an image of self-respect and be aware of the feelings of others.
- **Be gentle** — Gentleness is one of the secrets of success in interacting with others. It is not an evidence of weakness; indeed, it's a strength. Only the strong dare to be gentle.
- **Be tolerant** — Tolerance of others' actions is a positive experience, and one experience builds upon another as you develop tolerance.
- **Be understanding** — Empathy develops with experience. Being able to understand others is a valuable safety valve for you. Remember: Anger is one letter away from danger.
- **Be generous** — Giving of yourself is another of the good forces and reaps many rewards for most of us.
- **Be interested in others** — Genuine interest in others is a form of generosity and can lift you from a mundane existence to a fun world. Try to find something appealing in every individual.
- **Be industrious** — Be mentally and physically active; our bodies function more efficiently if we are active most of our waking hours.

- **Be constructively critical of yourself** — Be honest in self-examination, but don't over analyze. Be constructive when you criticize yourself and be proud of your accomplishments. Don't dwell on the things you've failed to do.
- **Be curious** — Be eager to learn and know as much as you can about everything.
- **Be open to new experiences** — Don't fear trying something new. Experiment and grow.
- **Be resilient** — When things don't go as you'd planned, work twice as hard at recovering your spirit and your good humor.
- **Be flexible** — Learn to compromise. Be able to reverse your routine without panic. Organization is the key to a productive existence, but few things are important enough that they can't be done another way.
- **Be good to look at** — Everything you are shows in your face. Your eyes and facial contours reflect your soul. Let your face be a reflection of the good things you feel.

*— Excerpted with permission from **The Effective Education Secretary** by Jean L. Priest and Associates, copyright 1989 by ETC Publications.*

What's your AQ? (Awareness Quotient?)

Often we forget that the finest public relations is built upon a foundation of accurate information, common sense and a sincere human concern for those we serve. This brief survey attempts to help you find out where your building or office ranks in some of those areas. It is NOT a report card on YOU as a school employee. It is just a guideline.

	Yes	No
• Do you know the boundaries of your school district?	☐	☐
• Can you name your school board members?	☐	☐
• Can you name the top school administrators, their positions and the departments reporting to them?	☐	☐
• Is someone in your building responsible for proofreading materials sent home to parents?	☐	☐
• Does your school preclude students from answering your telephone? (for elementary level)	☐	☐
• Do you personally greet new enrollees and their parents whenever you can?	☐	☐

- Does your building have a student or parent handbook to help interpret the rules and programs? ☐ ☐
- Have you a clear direction on what to do if the press calls you? ☐ ☐
- Can you name your bus drivers, most of the pickup points on the bus schedule? ☐ ☐
- Have you ever attended a board meeting? ☐ ☐
- Does your building have a regular staff communication system (either a newsletter or a regular face-to-face meeting) for the purpose of information sharing? ☐ ☐
- Does your school have regular social get-togethers that include all employees? ☐ ☐
- Does your school conduct a periodic community survey? ☐ ☐
- Are parents permitted in your school's lounge? ☐ ☐
- Do "paper" overloads get resolved before a "people" problem develops in your office? ☐ ☐
- Do you feel that your staff is willing to work on improving the district's "PR"? ☐ ☐
- Are you proud of your school? ☐ ☐

10 reminders about style

1. **NUMBERS**
   - **Ages** are always in numerals — He is 5 years old. The 12-year-old girls.
   - **Percents** are always in numerals — 3%, 9%, 25%, 67%.
   - **Millions and billions** are always in numerals — 4 million, $8 billion.
   - **ALL numbers below 10** are spelled out, including grades in a series — Tests will be given in grades four, eight and 10. Exception: K-8, K-12.

2. **HYPHENATION**
   - In general, there is no hyphen with "bi" — biannual, bimonthly, biweekly.
   - Words beginning with "sub" are NEVER hyphenated — subcommittee.
   - Words beginning with "multi" are NEVER hyphenated — multimillion.
   - Words beginning with "self" are ALWAYS hyphenated — self-employed.
   - For words beginning with "re," the general rule is that a hyphen is used if the word that follows begins with an "e" — re-elect, re-enter, re-establish.
     NOTE: Applies also to words beginning with "pre."
   - Use a hyphen for compound adjectives before a noun, **except**

for words that end in "ly" and quantitative modifiers such as very, most, least and less. When the modifier occurs after a form of the verb "to be," retain the hyphen, as in "The man is well-known."

NOTE: Well is always hyphenated when part of a modifier.

3. **CAPITALIZATION**
   - **Congress** is capitalized, **congressional** is not unless part of a title.
   - **Commonwealth** is capitalized only when using as Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Commonwealth Court, in full proper names. It is not capitalized when using as a reference to state as in "secretary of the commonwealth."
   - Names of **directions and seasons** are lower case — north, south, east, west, except when they designate regions; spring, summer, fall, winter.
   - Capitalize **titles** only before a person's name, including presi-

Some tips on word usage

Affect — to influence or act upon
Effect — Noun — the result, that which is brought about
Verb — to accomplish, bring about

Capital — city, chief
Capitol — building
Capitol Hill

Stationary — to stand still
Stationery — letterhead

Principal — someone or something first in rank or authority
Principle — fundamental truth

Well — hyphenate as part of a compound modifier: She is well-dressed.

Decades — 1970s — NO apostrophe (1970's) BUT use apostrophe for '70s

Some roundabout expressions

1. at all times	ALWAYS
2. any and all	ALL
3. are in possession of	HAVE
4. at this point in time	NOW
5. eliminate completely	ELIMINATE
6. cooperate together	COOPERATE
7. for the purpose of	FOR
8. in back of	BACK
9. in the event that	SHOULD
10. in view of the above	SINCE
11. in the meantime	WHILE
12. on a regular basis	REGULARLY
13. to the fullest extent	FULLY
14. were in attendance	ATTENDED
15. to be in a position to	TO
16. in reference to	ABOUT

dent. Example: PSBA Executive Director Joseph V. Oravitz, Superintendent John Citizen; but Jack Smith, school board president, and Michael Jones, principal.

4. **ACRONYMS** — Use an acronym **after** first reference — "The National School Boards Association announced today . . .. Further, NSBA said . . .." Do **not** use acronyms in parentheses after proper name, such as National School Boards Association (NSBA).

5. **SEMICOLONS** — Use semicolons to separate elements of a series when individual segments contain material that also must be set off by commas.
NOTE: The semicolon **is** used before the final **and** in such a series.

6. **PEOPLE, PERSONS** — Use **person** when speaking of an individual. The word **people** is preferred to persons in all plural

uses: "Thousands of people attended the conference." People is a collective noun that takes a plural verb when referring to a single race or nation: "The American people are united."

7. **NONE** — Usually means "no single one." When used in this sense, it ALWAYS takes a singular verb and pronoun: "None of the seats was in its right place." Use a plural verb **only** if the sense is no two or no amount: "None of the taxes have been paid."

8. **EACH** — Takes a **singular** verb: "Each member is qualified to vote."

9. **OVER, MORE THAN** — Over is not interchangeable with more than. **Over** refers to spatial relationships: "The plane flew over the city." **More than** is used with figures in years, dollars, quantity: "More than 40,000 fans were in the stadium." "The budget will be more than $8 million this fiscal year."

Some old, trite and hackneyed expressions

1. afford an opportunity to ..... TAKE
2. are of the opinion that ..... THINK
3. concerning the matter of ..... ABOUT
4. be of the opinion that ..... THINK
5. beg to differ ..... DISAGREE
6. continue to remain ..... AM
7. due to the fact that ..... BECAUSE
8. fully cognizant of ..... AWARE
9. have noted the contents of ..... READ
10. in accordance with your request ..... AS REQUESTED
11. it is apparent, therefore that ..... APPARENTLY
12. in view of the fact that ..... BECAUSE
13. pursuant to your request ..... AS REQUESTED
14. report to the effect that ..... REPORT THAT
15. this is to acknowledge receipt of ..... WE RECEIVED

10. ENSURE, INSURE — Use **ensure** to mean guarantee: "Steps were taken to ensure accuracy." Use **insure** for references to insurance: "The policy insures his life."

Some commonly misspelled words

Accessible
Accommodate
Accommodations
Acknowledgment
Adviser
All right — **not** alright

Biannual
Bimonthly — no hyphen
Boardmanship — NOT boardsmanship
Born — birth
Borne — carried
Boundary — boundaries
Bylaws — one word

Coed — one word
Commitment — one t
Compatible
Consensus
Cooperate
Coordinate
Credible

Deductible
Dependent
Defendant
Desirable

Enforceable

Foregoing — preceding
Forgoing — forsake, renounce
Foreword — a preface

Grassroots — one word

Inasmuch as
Incidentally
Incur
Incurred

Judgment — no e

Knowledgeable

Liaison

Manageable
Misspelled
Monies — not moneys

Nationwide — one word
Nonetheless

Occasion — one s
Occurred
Occurrence
Omissions — one m

Parliamentary
Pastime — one t
Permissible
Prerogative
Privilege
Politicking
Precede — not a double e

Recurrence — not reoccurrence
Responsibility

Separate
Statewide — one word
Subcommittee — one word

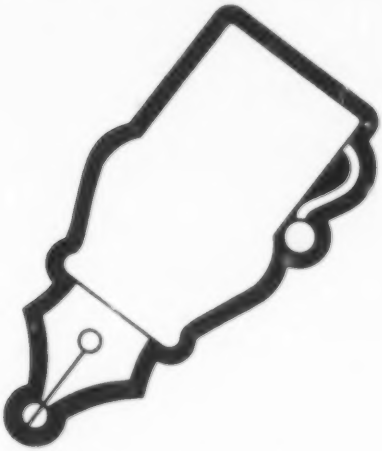
Toward — not towards

Usable — not useable
Usage — not useage

Willful
Worldwide — one word
Workday — one word
Workweek — one word
Workforce — one word

10 common time 'leaks'

1. Starting a job before thinking it through.
2. Doing unproductive things from sheer habit.
3. Keeping too many unnecessary records.
4. Paying too much attention to "low return on investment" items.
5. Failing to anticipate crises.
6. Making unnecessary visits or phone calls.
7. Socializing at great lengths between tasks.
8. Failing to build good barriers against interruptions.
9. Doing things that aren't part of the job.
10. Engaging in personal work before starting business work.



Little words that give us trouble

You and other members of the central office staff probably know how to use correctly big words such as presumptive and fulminate, but what about the short two or three-letter words? It's the little words that give us most trouble. Here's a list of helpful reminders.

• **Also** — This word causes trouble because it floats too easily all over a sentence. Keep it under control. *Also* is an adverb; it should be placed as close to the word it qualifies as the sentence permits. "The investigation also examined the records . . ."

• **As** — Don't use this to mean "because" or "since." It means "in the same manner." Correct usage: "The figures were drawn as the instruction required." Caution: Avoid using *as to.*

• **But** — This short, powerful word may be used to begin a sentence you wish to emphasize. "But listen to this" is an example.

• **Have** — Avoid using this word twice in one sentence. Poor usage: "It would have been better to have left this . . ." One *have* in a sentence is enough.

• **It** — Confine your use of this word to a pronoun. This means avoiding such phrases as "It is apparent that . . ." Especially

bad is the use of this little word twice in a sentence, as in "It is believed that it would be better if . . ."

• **Of** — Instead of writing "Progress has been made in the establishment of . . .," it's better to say "in establishing . . ." and the *of* is no longer needed. Here are two poor uses of the word, followed by correct ones: "Cancellation of the orders came yesterday." ("The orders were cancelled yesterday.") "The work involves copying of many pages." ("The work involves copying many pages.")

• **Only** — Place this word as close as possible to the word it qualifies.

• **Outside of** — *Of* can usually be eliminated in this phrase. "The information was obtained outside the country" is better than ". . . outside of . . .".

• **Proved** — This is the preferred word. *Proven* is considered old-fashioned.

• **That** — An old but useful rule is to follow the verbs of believing, feeling, saying and thinking by *that*. In other phrases and sentences *that* can be omitted. If you're working with a clause that defines a word or phrase and the clause becomes an intimate part of the words being defined, *that* is proper. "The trouble that the boy had with arithmetic was soon cured . . ."

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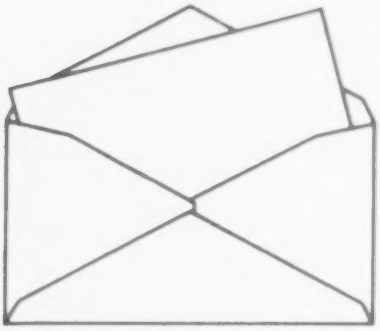

Memos and letters

You probably will want to consider developing a uniform style and usage for memos and letters within your school. In general, a letter is for communicating with those outside the school; a memo is sent to those within the school.

Letters — Should be used as a form of communication with parents, other schools or businesses. Letters contain an inside address, salutation and complimentary closing, and should be arranged block style. Letters usually are written in the first person; trends today are away from the stiff formal tone that characterized letters of several years ago. Letters always are typed or printed on the school's official stationery.

Memos — Memos should be used to communicate with employees who work for the school, regardless of where they may be located — in the same office, in the same building, or in another building. Memos were developed to be time-saving interoffice communications; therefore the formality of an inside address, salutation and complimentary closing is omitted. Memos are set up in block style, omitting personal titles in the heading (Miss, Mr., Ms., Dr., etc.). Memos are written in the first person. If the memo is typed by a secretary for someone else, reference initials should always be placed a double space below the message at the left margin. If you are initiating the memo, it is correct, but not necessary, to place your initials on the memo.

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Addressing envelopes

Style — Type the address in block style (**all caps**), single-spaced, without internal or end-of-line punctuation. Type the city name, state abbreviation and ZIP code on the last address line. The ZIP code is typed two spaces after the state abbreviation.

Addressee Notations — Type addressee notations, such as **Hold for Arrival, Please Forward, Personal,** etc., a triple space below the return address and about three spaces from the left edge of the envelope. Use **all caps.** Type the **Attention line** on the next line below the company name.

Mailing Notations — Type mailing notations (Special Delivery, Registered, Certified, etc.) below the stamp, in **all caps,** at least three spaces above the envelope address.

Correct word usage

accept — to receive
except — to leave out

anyway
anyhow — interchangeable

alright — not a word
all right — correct

although
though — interchangeable

adapt — fit for new use
adopt — choose

anyway — in any event
any way — in "any one" way

already — previously
all ready — everything is ready

all together — everyone together

altogether — entirely

affect — to influence
effect — to bring about

adverse — unfavorable
adverse to — against

among — three or more
between — only two involved

can not — formal
cannot — informal

capital — wealth, city
capitol — a building

compliment — praise
complement — to make complete

continual — interrupted
continuous — uninterrupted

chose — did choose
choose — to select

compose — to calm
comprise — to be made up of

credible — believable
creditable — deserving credit

disapprove — not approve
disprove — prove false

divers — various
diverse — different

data — singular or plural
datum — singular only

different from — correct usage
different than — incorrect

disinterested — impartial
uninterested — lacking interest

excess — extra amount
excessive — unreasonable

expeditious — speedy
expedient — means to an end

fewer — quantity, units
less — a number

farther — distance, measured
further — use for everything else

forgo — to go without
forego — to go before

imminent — about to happen
eminent — distinguished

implies — speaker, writer
infers — reader, listener

irregardless — incorrect
regardless — in spite of

lay — put down
lie — lie in place

practical — useful, workable
practicable — possible, feasible

sometime — indefinite time
some time — a period of time

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